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YA SHOULDA, OUGHTA, WANNA, OR, LAWS OF BEHAVIOR AND BEHAVIORAL COMMUNITY RESEARCH

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Reminiscences

The early days of behavioral community psychology could not have occurred at a more opportune time. The social consciousness of the 1960s became the awareness of the multiple social and environmental challenges that we faced in the 1970s. Early articles reporting successful behavioral community interventions were exciting on many fronts. First, they offered promise in addressing pressing "front page" social issues. Second, they helped to demonstrate the viability of behavioral technology in new and complicated environments. Third, they showed potential support of behavior analysis by the general culture. Our interventions need not be reserved for persons with disabilities, children, nonhuman species, and others without a powerful voice.

Despite these robust beginnings, by the mid-1980s behavioral community research remained a shadow of its earlier promise. Researchers continued to explore new vistas and demonstrate empirically validated solutions to problems, but rates of adoption remained equivocal. Although many behavior analysts were convinced of their effects and actively advocated for wide-scale use, few solutions were readily adopted. On the other hand, a naive, generic, and misinterpreted version of "behaviorism" was being ineptly applied in too many situations. It was not unusual to walk into any of a number of settings and find some "behavioral program" in force that "made" somebody do something "or else." In short order, some of our discussions about the promise of behavioral community research changed to empathic statements about what communities and social groups "should," "ought," or "want to" do about a number of social issues. We had come full circle. We forgot that our "subjects" were responding lawfully and that we as scientists were failing to understand the contingencies effecting their behavior.

Although early field results were encouraging, they were typically demonstrations about the promise of the technology. Yes, it was possible to establish and manipulate selected variables to effect behavior in these new domains, but we were not always addressing relevant variables inherent in the prevailing environment. Treatment conditions were often alien to the situation at hand. Given the resources of the research project, these contrived contingencies could be implemented and maintained for a selected period of time. Once project resources ended, however, it was no surprise when the contingencies faded and effects decayed. (But people "shoulda, oughta, wanna" keep the program going.)

Because of a lack of relationship to the prevailing environment, many early studies could not always take advantage of naturally available short-term contingencies. Expectations of continued behavior change based on the promise of long-term effects belied our own data. There are no such things as long-term consequences! Long-term consequences are the function of hierarchies or chains of short-term consequences. This has been demonstrated by every major cultural change agent, including such role models as Jesus Christ, Mohandas Gandhi, and Martin Luther King. Aspiring towards long-term goals is approximated one step at a time with extensive systems of social reinforcement and other immediate support. (But people "shoulda, oughta, wanna" do what's best for them in the long term. They don't!)

In our quest for logical and empirical solutions

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to specific problems, we often failed to understand the big picture, especially as it related to benefit–cost analyses, prevailing culture, and adoption. Competing interests, naive assumptions about complex interrelationships, politics, macroeconomics, cultural and religious practices, and other variables inherent in daily life are not easy to reduce to a journal page or dissertation, but are salient factors in any community. It is not only the direct intervention whose costs must be determined relative to outcome effect, but also the system that supports its delivery, the system it modifies or replaces, and the costs of program perpetuation.

The weighting of these variables in program analysis is highly speculative and rarely static. Linear analyses have little success compared to mathematical chaos models that try to account for active–interactive change among all variables. With no effective methods to enter these factors into social equations neatly, they may be ignored, yet few of us would not acknowledge their importance in our programs.

For example, when my colleagues and I were developing a community recycling program, political support came from a county commissioner who had promised such a program by the next election. Funding was denied by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (which publicly supported recycling) but did come from the U.S. Department of Labor (which was interested in jobs for unskilled workers). One year later, the program had proven itself cost effective by all research criteria, yet it was not readily adopted by county engineers, who were attempting to justify the costs of a newly purchased landfill. Instead, it was turned over and successfully continued by a private group because it was financially profitable and, thus, the domain of the private sector. Hence, what "shoulda, oughta, wanna" happen and what did happen were two different sets of circumstances. An empiricist would have to acknowledge that the actual way the program developed and was adopted was lawful, if not logical. Then again, if the world adhered to the rules of logic, there would be little need for empiricism. The world would truly be "shoulda, oughta, wanna."

Relevance to Work in Behavioral Community Applications Today

The promise of behavioral community psychology remains as vibrant today as it was 20 years ago. We now have the benefit of having been shaped by the forces operating on our field over time. In our enthusiasm to promote the field, we may do well to consider several sets of distinctions.

First, there are differences among advocacy, application, and research. Each has its appropriate place, and none is mutually exclusive. Advocacy involves assessment, resource procurement, and the call for action. Application involves implementation of the action. Both can occur systematically or unsystematically and can be conducted by many different entities for many different objectives, including research. Research involves the systematic inquiry into a specific topic according to accepted rules. These rules are governed by the philosophical and conventional actions of the selected discipline with different disciplines using different criteria. The products of research are answers to questions. It is possible, but not necessary, to invoke research to conduct applications or advocacy.

Second, there are many forms of research, each with its own merits and limitations. Behavioral community research is recognized by its ties to applied behavior analysis. Inherent in this alliance is the requirement to demonstrate functional, causal relations between behavior and manipulated variables, convincing and socially relevant effects, and rigorously prescribed methods of data collection and evaluation. These requirements limit the social challenges amendable by our field, given its current state of the art.

These same requirements have also served behavior analysis well by establishing its credibility and challenging researchers to innovate within this functional and empirical framework. Reliance on social and operational tests of significance incurs a functional rigor not found in many other social sciences, as well as the flexibility to consider small functional wins over time. It also challenges the researcher to discover methods for empirically documenting the chains of behavior and outcome lead-

ing up to these long-term effects, which in turn strengthen the tools of our science.

A goal of behavior analysis is to build and use a science of human behavior. Using scientific inquiry to describe the human condition and describing the human condition by scientific inquiry are two separate issues. Rather than risk the credibility of our methodology, issues that we are not capable of currently addressing may have to remain the purview of other disciplines of discovery until we evolve. We each make personal and professional choices regarding the merits and utility of different approaches in each project we conduct.

Third is the issue of resources and power. Access to resources is a principal form of cultural power. Knowledge, a primary product of research, is a form of power when it aids access to and enables more effective use of resources. However, knowledge alone is often insufficient to foster long-term change.

Effective long-term programs must be able to perpetuate their resources; otherwise, outcomes can disappear with the researcher or innovator. Ideally, these resources come as a product of intervention-induced change or as a result of a chain set in motion by the intervention. For example, the market value of recycled products pays for their collection, the social reinforcement and avoidance of violence may promote voluntary participation in crime watch programs, and so on. The more tenuous the relationship between program resources, its goals, and the prevailing environment, the less likely it is that the program will be sustained. Compare the many well-meaning social programs that close each year due to lack of funding to what the average consumer in this society spends money on. Lasting products and programs have learned how to tap into short-term contingencies and complex chains of social behavior, one step at a time.

This hardly means we have to come up with snappy jingles to sustain our outcomes, but it does mean we need to look beyond that good old generalized conditioned reinforcer of money as the only resource. Successful programs are also capable of identifying and directly accessing the necessary resources that money allows access to, whether this is person power, information, goods, social reinforcement, behavior exchanges, or other resources. This may also help to assure that the intervention is more closely aligned with the prevailing environment. Each type of resource has its own associated costs, whether they be the considerable regulations involved when using powerful generalized conditioned reinforcers such as money or the extensive behavioral effort involved in grassroots resources. It is incumbent for the behavioral community researcher to at least offer, if not demonstrate, methods for securing the resources required to sustain program effects.

Researchers are just as susceptible to the costs and requirements of resources as the constituents are. As has been amply demonstrated by recent events at the National Endowment for the Arts, selected members of society can place their own demands on our efforts for a variety of motives. The publish-or-perish environment of many universities demonstrates correlative relations, at best, between successful cultural change and continuing support. Successful programs do not always guarantee grants and publications, nor does the ability to write grants or articles guarantee that the person can successfully conduct a program. Universities are just as likely to be considered systems of cultural perpetuation as systems of cultural change.

Businesses, government agencies, and other large-scale social systems also impose their own requirements for those who operate in each type of environment. It is the responsibility of the researcher to identify and report the multiple sources of control affecting his or her behavior so that consumers can evaluate the product relative to personal accountabilities and biases. For example, consider how most health professionals evaluate the relevance of smoking research that is funded by the Tobacco Institute.

This brings us to the final area of ethics and constituency. The complex environments of most community work involve multiple and often competing sources of control. Just as it is incumbent for the researcher to divulge the contingencies in effect for his or her behavior, it is incumbent for the researcher to consider the multiple sources of control and effects on all parties that may be in-

volved or affected by the intervention. This is a point that Fawcett (1991) amply articulates. This also distinguishes one form of research from application and advocacy, where the individual or group may be working solely for their own gain. Anybody with access to sufficient resources can implement a program. We ascribe to a higher order of ethics, evaluation, and dissemination through our research activities.

Summary

The promise of behavioral community research remains as vibrant today as it was in the 1970s. Although rates of adoption may be below the dreams of its original pioneers, it is ultimately the prevailing environment that determines the functionality of the enterprise. On that scorecard, we continue to be shaped.

Innovation and adaptation are critical elements to the survival of any system, and many of the suggestions by Fawcett (1991) are well received. The 10 values he prescribes cover ethical principles for many lines of research with all species and settings, let alone community applications.

Recommendations for changes in methodological approach, however, offer other considerations. The philosophical framework of behavior analysis has produced a powerful technology in selected areas of human endeavor. In other areas it has not been as effective. Is it better to have a well-proscribed but limited technology that is slowly evolving through guided principles, or to alter these principles to expand available topics? How does the environment shape these principles?

My personal preference is for functional evolution rather than calls for revolution. Although the utility of our field may be limited relative to all pressing problems, it seems better to maintain its rigor than to risk its most valuable resource of empirical credibility for greater appeal. In the meantime, other methodologies are available to address some of the concerns that Fawcett (1991) raises. Each has its own strengths and limitations. Those of us involved in community research have learned to use many of these techniques in addition to behavior analysis in our work. Although perhaps not as satisfying as directly reporting all of our work to our behavioral colleagues, it fosters the integral development of our field within rigorous methodological limits, presenting somewhat of an "acid test" for convincing results. It also has the indirect effect of requiring us to disseminate some of our results to other audiences. This in turn educates them about some of the elements of a behavioral approach by virtue of our personal orientation. It also fosters potential innovation in our field through exposure to the ideas of others.

Finally, we must consider the many hats we each wear. These include roles as researcher, advocate, and innovator, as well as personal interests. How we affect and are affected by our overall environment is a combination of all of these salient factors. Cultural innovation begins from basal levels. I think that Fraizer, in his cluttered room at Walden Two, would agree (Skinner, 1948).

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